

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 171 852

UD 019 540

AUTHOR
TITLE

Eash, Maurice J.; Bernstein, Jean C.
Analysis and Evaluation of Strategies for Improving
Educational Achievement Under Desegregation: A Case
Study of Park Forest-Chicago Heights Elementary
District 163 (Cook County, Illinois).

PUB DATE
NOTE

Apr 79
9p.; Not available in hard copy due to print quality
of the original document; Paper presented at the
Annual Conference of the American Educational
Research Association (San Francisco, California,
April, 1979)

EDRS PRICE
DESCRIPTORS

MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
*Academic Achievement; *Board of Education Policy;
*Educational Assessment; Educational Improvement;
*Educational Strategies; Elementary Secondary
Education; Equal Education; *Instructional
Improvement; Program Evaluation; *School Integration;
School Organization

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explicate, analyze
and evaluate the strategies used by the school district to improve
student achievement. The first section of the report reviews
background information about the evaluation program in the district.
Subsequent sections of the report describe the manner in which action
programs were developed to strengthen classroom instruction, the
staging of these activities, and the role evaluation played in
devising strategies. Specific strategies discussed are those used
for: (1) the development of instructional guidelines; (2)
redefinition of administrative roles; and (3) establishment of equal
educational opportunity as a common district goal. The effectiveness
of each of these strategies is assessed and the last section of the
report summarizes conclusions drawn from the district's experience.
(Author/EB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT UNDER DESEGREGATION: A CASE STUDY OF PARK FOREST -
CHICAGO HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY DISTRICT 163 (COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Maurice J. Eash, Dean, College of Education
University of Illinois at Chicago Circle

and

Jean C. Bernstein, Assistant Superintendent
School District 163, Park Forest, Illinois

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Eash

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The success or failure of mandated school desegregation has aroused public attention and debate over the past decade. Certainly those school districts where desegregation has been implemented have a critical interest in the academic and affective outcomes for students and in the social and political effects of desegregation on school and community life.

Since September of 1972, when a mandatory desegregation plan was implemented in Park Forest School District 163, the district has had a sustained relationship with the Office of Evaluation Research, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, through which the two institutions have cooperated to evaluate the district desegregation program. This relationship developed from the district's wish to conduct a longitudinal study of the impact of desegregation on student attitudes and achievement. During the period covered by this report, both authors were associated with this project; one headed the OER evaluation team while the other served as Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum in the school district.

The Office of Evaluation Research designed for the district a series of evaluations for each of the first five years of desegregation within specific constraints of money, school functioning and community concerns. The district committed a limited amount of money to this evaluation initially; money committed dwindled with each successive year of desegregation. In addition, there were the usual constraints that evaluation should not be disruptive of school functioning, constraints which ruled out such methodological niceties as randomization of subjects. Community sensitivities also placed some restrictions on the gathering and use of individual student data.

The purpose of this paper is to explicate, analyze and evaluate the strategies used by the school district to improve achievement. The first section of the report reviews background information about the evaluation program in the district. Subsequent sections of the report describe the manner in which action programs were developed to strengthen classroom instruction, the staging of these activities, and the role evaluation played in devising strategies. The specific strategies to be discussed are those used for: (1) development of instructional guidelines; (2) redefinition of administrative roles; and (3) establishment of equal educational opportunity as a common district goal. The effectiveness of each of these strategies is assessed and the last section of the report summarizes conclusions drawn from the district's experience.

ED171868

UD019540

Methods and Data Sources

Although the evaluation program in the district has been reported at previous AERA meetings and in educational publications, it seems appropriate to summarize this program as background information for the other papers that follow. During the three school years, 1972-73, 73-74 and 74-75, evaluation efforts focused upon analysis of both student achievement and student perceptions of the learning environment; scores of yearly standardized achievement tests and attitudinal surveys were the main data source. Three additional evaluation efforts were also conducted during the first year of desegregation: (1) a community survey of attitudes toward the schools; (2) a staff survey; and (3) a behavioral analysis of disciplinary incidents in the two junior high schools. An intensive study of the classroom functioning of fourth grade students which included classroom observation and student and teacher interviews was made during the third year and provided crucial data for focusing inservice efforts.

The longitudinal analysis of data continued after the third year of desegregation, but because of limited funds, the main data source became standardized test information from the district's yearly administration of an achievement test to students in grades 3 - 7. In addition, the district has used the resources of OER staff members in informal consultation on specific educational and evaluation problems and has participated in a joint project to explore educational productivity factors associated with the maximization of student achievement. The longitudinal data, analyzed and interpreted over the course of these evaluation studies, demonstrates that all students within the district have appeared to benefit both socially and academically from school desegregation.

Instructional Guidelines

Prior to desegregation, the district had no formal written curriculum to guide classroom instructional practices. The nine elementary schools in the district were seen as neighborhood schools, each with its own characteristics and needs, each free to develop a curriculum that reflected neighborhood priorities. The differences among school programs caused some articulation difficulties when students moved into the two junior high schools in the district; however, these difficulties were not viewed as a major district problem.

When the district desegregated, the K-6 elementary schools were reorganized into primary and intermediate centers under the grade reorganization desegregation plan. The plan required a high degree of staff and student movement as teachers and students of grade levels no longer to be maintained at a particular school site moved to a new site. While the absence of written curriculum guidelines was not of great concern to district teachers during the first year of desegregation, it became a major community issue. Parents, who had few opportunities to make comparisons among elementary schools when their children attended only the neighborhood school, began to make open and sometimes angry comparisons. Fear that educational standards had declined became an oft-stated parent criticism. It was obvious to the district administrative staff that this concern must be addressed if parent support for integration was to be maintained.

The district began a sequential process of curriculum development beginning with the basic skill areas of reading and mathematics and proceeding through

other subject areas. The result was a detailed curriculum notebook which district teachers facetiously refer to as "The Blue Bible." Curriculum development for each area was placed in the hands of a teacher committee, most often composed of one teacher from each school, and working on released time, under the direction of the assistant superintendent for curriculum. Each committee developed a K-8 curriculum sequence for their area of study and established learner objectives for each grade or instructional level. The development process included opportunities for teacher review before presentation of the curriculum to the district-wide curriculum council for approval and to the board of education for adoption.

This curriculum development process had both benefits and costs. Teacher members of the various curriculum committees found their committee work to be a major stimulus for professional growth. They became the math or science or language arts expert within their building and were able to make significant contributions as both building and district teacher leaders. A fairly significant number of teachers outside the committee process, however, saw the development of written curriculum guidelines as an infringement of academic freedom. The issue of the district's right to establish instructional mandates became, and continues to be, a source of conflict in the minds of some teachers.

Written guidelines, without a support system for the implementation of these guidelines, are meaningless. In addition to developing curriculum, each teacher committee assisted in planning inservice strategies to encourage teachers to improve their instructional competency. The district initiated an extensive program of professional growth opportunities for teachers. These opportunities included: (1) university credit courses offered within the district, (2) in-district inservice courses conducted by outside consultants or district staff members, (3) mandatory released time teacher inservice sessions, (4) consultant work with teachers within their own classroom or building, (5) visitation by teachers to other schools in the district or to outside schools, (6) summer grants to teachers to develop classroom learning activities. The district was assisted in the effort to become its own teacher-training institution by funds available from title projects -- largely Title I and Title VII -- and from carefully selected Title IV-C adapter-adopter grants.

The longitudinal analysis of district achievement test data became a powerful force in extending teacher and board support for the curriculum development process. Using one area, mathematics, as an example, a significant upturn in student arithmetic achievement corresponded with the development of a K-8 mathematics curriculum and a saturation program of math inservice. District students during the first few years of desegregation tested on the average slightly below grade level in total arithmetic and well below grade in arithmetic computation. Thereafter, math scores began a steady rise and district students on the average today test slightly above grade in both total arithmetic and arithmetic computation. Evaluation data analyzed and fed back to the staff thus provided an ongoing rationale for curriculum and inservice efforts.

Moreover, as teachers saw hard data demonstrating increased mathematics mastery by their students, they became more involved in the evaluation process and more critical of standardized mathematics tests. While the achievement test used did provide comparison with a national norm standard, it did not give teachers or the district a curriculum specific assessment. Teachers on the math committee

worked with a math consultant and a test and measurement expert to develop a series of criterion-referenced tests for each level of the district math curriculum. The test is now administered in May to measure student mastery of the skills taught during the year. A commercial criterion-referenced test in reading is also administered in September to provide a diagnostic profile of each student's reading strengths and reading needs.

Redefinition of Administrative Roles

The analyses of achievement data during the first two years of desegregation showed some dramatic differences among schools that puzzled district administrators in view of the student balance among the schools associated with desegregation. It seemed apparent at first glance that some schools were more effective in their delivery of instructional services than others and that an analysis of classroom and school functioning was needed. Arrangements were made with the OER staff for an across-the-district study of teachers and students at the fourth grade level. The results of this study verified significant differences in the structure of classroom programs, ranging from well-designed instructional settings to instructional chaos.

The discussion of this study within the administrative staff uncovered philosophic differences among building principals as to administrative roles within the district. While central office administrators projected the expectation that the major responsibility of principals was to provide effective instructional leadership at the building level, this expectation was neither clear to principals nor reflective of their own role perceptions. The central office administration began intensive discussions with principals to clarify and define administrative roles. Perhaps the most powerful opportunity for discussion came as a result of the involvement of all administrative staff members in a week-long summer retreat at which educational differences were debated and common administrative goals developed.

Teacher evaluation was established as a priority goal for administrators at all levels under the general district goal of instructional improvement. Administrators in the district became involved in a series of workshop experiences to sharpen their skills as evaluators; most of these sessions were conducted by two university consultants. The superintendent and his staff began to hold fall conferences with each principal at which an important part of the conference became the identification of specific teachers in that building about whom the principal or the superintendents were concerned. Part of the principal's evaluation was tied to his or her success in helping the identified teachers improve. The three central office administrators worked closely with principals to assist them in developing strategies to help tenure teachers grow. As a result, principals became more supportive of the central office position that only the most outstanding non-tenured teachers should receive tenure in the district.

These expectations were coupled with an aggressive program to remove incompetent teachers without violating good human relations precepts or state tenure laws. Principals were able to counsel some ineffective teachers out of teaching and into other occupations. In other situations, teachers were removed from the classroom and their contract for the year paid up in full in return for their resignation. Over the course of four to five years, the district has been

able to remove from its teaching staff a number of incompetent teachers and to assist others to become more competent. Principals, too, have been replaced, either because they found themselves at odds with district philosophy and unable to meet district expectations, and as schools were closed, they were not retained in administrative roles.

The district has now developed a teacher evaluation instrument stating expectations for teacher performance that will eventually be used as the reporting form for all teacher evaluations in the district. The instrument was developed last spring by a committee of administrators and teacher organization representatives; it is being pilot-tested this year with all tenure teachers for whom the 1978-79 school year is their scheduled evaluation year as part of the three-year cycle for evaluation of tenure teachers. It is not presently being used with non-tenure teachers or with tenure teachers being evaluated out-of-cycle. The instrument will be revised next spring based upon our experience with it during this pilot-test year.

The instrument, in its present form, establishes four areas for teacher evaluation: (1) instruction; (2) classroom management; (3) professional conduct; and (4) parent-school relations. Performance skills are listed under each area with evidence for satisfactory performance of that skill outlined as well. Under instruction, for example, one of the performance skills is stated as follows:

Uses diagnostic data to assess each student, as evidenced by:

- organizing existing data from student cumulative and special service folders.
- providing samples of formal and informal diagnostic devices used to assess student needs.
- describing the diagnostic process as applied to selected individual students.

Under classroom management, another performance skill states:

Provides an atmosphere in which students remain on task, as evidenced by:

- minimal interruption of one student by another.
- smooth transition from one activity to another.
- teacher monitoring of student on-task behavior.

The teacher evaluation reporting form complements an administrative evaluation form developed two years ago by the central office administrative staff for use with principals and program directors. The administrative form outlines specific expectations for those at the middle management level. These expectations are discussed throughout the year at principal conferences held after school visits; the superintendent and his two assistants visit every classroom in the district each year.

As with the development of instructional guidelines, this clarification of administrative roles has not been accomplished without some discomfort. A frequent complaint from both principals and teachers is that expectations in the district are "too high" and that the central office exerts too much "pressure." While these concerns have some merit, we fully believe that strong

administrative leadership has been a major factor in our ability as a district to increase the instructional effectiveness of our schools and to improve student achievement.

Equal Educational Opportunity

The educational issues in a desegregated school system change as the system changes and progresses. Initially, in our district, while both minority and majority parents approached desegregation with great misgiving, majority parents were more vocal in their criticism of the schools. Our evaluation program has done much to silence these critics. Through objective analyses, we have demonstrated that middle class children not only do not suffer educationally in a desegregated educational setting but that the mean achievement of majority students actually has increased during desegregation. The instructional improvements made in the district have markedly benefited students from that group.

As we have reviewed our evaluation data each year, we have been encouraged by results demonstrating that minority students have also benefited as shown by their higher achievement scores. Despite these increases by minority students, our district, like almost all desegregated districts, continues to have an unacceptable gap between the mean achievement scores of majority and minority students. Our evaluation program is now directed toward the exploration of this gap and the development of strategies that can be used by schools to become a more potent force in equalizing educational opportunity for children from the less economically advantaged strata of our community.

Our efforts in this area are concentrated around three thrusts:

1. The study of available research through analysis of material provided by OER staff members who have been our main resource in the evaluation process and through examination of other available research studies such as Benjamin Bloom's recent book, Human Characteristics and School Learning.
2. The association with the OER staff in a cooperative project to investigate educational productivity factors in the classroom and in the home that influence student achievement and the inter-relationships among these factors.
3. The discussion at every level within our district, with the assistance of out-of-district human relations consultants, of the conscious and unconscious practices that negatively influence the achievement of minority students.

These more theoretical approaches guide strategies directed toward the problems associated with the provision of equal educational opportunity. On the action level, the district has adopted as its major emphasis for the year these goals --

To work toward the implementation of equal educational opportunity through the exploration as a district of the variables that influence student achievement:

1. To improve the quality of instruction in every classroom.

2. To improve the learning environment in every classroom, i.e., the sense of cohesiveness and purpose, the engaged time for learning.
3. To increase home support for the learning of individual students.

The district administrative staff has developed action steps under each of these goals to direct administrative performance for the year. Each building staff in the district has also developed action steps under each goal to guide school performance. A common feature among the action steps at both the district and building level is the monitoring of the academic progress of those minority students now functioning below grade. Classroom teachers throughout the district have each selected approximately five students for whom diagnostic, prescriptive programs have been developed; program progress is being assessed on a quarterly basis. Each building principal has also selected two students from each classroom to monitor. Principal involvement in the monitoring process includes teacher conferencing, parent conferences and home visits. Through the monitoring process, we hope to translate our general concern for equal educational opportunity into concrete teacher, student, parent and administrator behaviors that will increase the achievement of minority students. Both the goals we have established and the action steps associated with these goals assume a continued relationship with those from the OER staff who have worked with us for the past seven years to provide a data base for our educational decisions.

Conclusions

From this retrospective analyses of data and experience over the past years, we have come to a number of tentative conclusions about educational strategies which have been successful in promoting achievement and racial harmony in the schools.

1. An evaluation research design is essential to guide data gathering, monitor efforts and assist in the development of policy and planning for educational improvement. The data provided our district through successive analyses of student achievement and school functioning became the stimulus for ongoing improvements in the district curriculum, in teacher and administrative inservice, in teacher evaluation, in the development of district educational goals.
2. Desegregation can be accompanied by improved achievement for all children if attention is given to improving classroom instruction. The quality of instruction, or what happens at the end of the bus ride, is a more critical factor in parent support for desegregation than busing itself.
3. Improvement in classroom instruction requires a systems approach at the building level where principals take a direct part in upgrading the level of instructional functioning in their building. Here, our experience bears out the conventional belief that a strong and effective principal is a critical factor in the success of an individual school.
4. District efforts in providing teacher-training experiences and in articulating district goals can set an educational climate that

promotes staff commitment and growth but these efforts are not of as powerful effect in raising student achievement as direct principal attention to the instructional design characteristics of classrooms within the building and of the building educational program as a whole.

5. Improvement of achievement appears to be a function of two major variables: (a) the instructional and curriculum design; and (b) the home environment. In the long run, major gains in achievement seem to be predicated on stimulation of factors in both areas. Schools can ill afford to neglect the development of strategies that encourage parent participation in planning a child's instructional program.
6. Evaluation research designs can turn many of the uncertainties and fears that accompany desegregation into specific data questions. Subsequent investigations on specific questions can serve to temper parent anxiety, to refute concerns that achievement is falling, to prevent parent flight. Data-based studies also permit the mapping of strategies for direct action that maintain parent confidence in the schools.

Desegregation plans using busing have not been successful in many school districts. Busing has unfortunately come to symbolize all that is negative in desegregation and has served to rally opposition to desegregation. A major fear aroused in the desegregation of a school district is the fear that educational achievement will be reduced for children who are forced to be part of a desegregation plan. A concomitant of forced desegregation in some districts has been white flight from the district, across-district resegregation (Coleman, 1975), and a burgeoning of private and parochial school populations.

Our district's experience with desegregation has run counter to this trend. The improvement in educational practices and the increases in student achievement accomplished by the district with the assistance of evaluation research have maintained community support for desegregation and prevented any large scale flight. Our study demonstrates that desegregation can be accomplished without attendant social disruption. While our experience as yet cannot be generalized to other school districts, it does have implications for strategies that mitigate some of the problems that appear to accompany desegregation efforts and to suggest new lines of research for investigators.

A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, Division H Symposium, Optimizing Achievement in a Desegregated School District: The Uses of Education Research, San Francisco, April 1979.